



South Mountain Freeway foes start letters campaign

Kerry Fehr-Snyder

The Arizona Republic

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South Mountain Freeway foes opposed to building the freeway along Pecos Road will send letters to state leaders and Arizona's congressional delegates in the next two weeks asking for answers to a myriad of environmental and logistical questions.

Gov. Janet Napolitano, who hasn't stated her opinion about the 22-mile route proposed through Ahwatukee Foothills, will be among those receiving letters from the Ahwatukee Foothills Village Planning Committee. The committee met Monday night to discuss the letters and vote on whether they should be sent.

The committee also decided to send a personalized letter to the executive committee of the Maricopa Association of Governments, which weighed in on the controversial 10-lane freeway last week by drafting a letter to Napolitano expressing frustration in delays over environmental studies of the freeway and the start of its construction.

MAG's seven-member executive committee also may ask for Napolitano to intervene in the freeway's development by negotiating with the Gila River Indian Community to build the multi-billion dollar freeway on land owned by the tribe or its allottees south and west of Ahwatukee.

The village planning committee, which is comprised of residents appointed by Phoenix City Councilman Greg Stanton, was careful not to echo MAG's draft letter. Village planning committee members are staunchly opposed to the South Mountain Freeway, which would bulldoze at least 250 homes and cut a huge chunk out of South Mountain Preserve, the largest public park in the country.

MAG's executive committee decided last Monday to table the draft letter to Napolitano but plans to take the issue up again in May.

What do you think?

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Your comments

@Dustin2851:

The tribe is closing down the 101 tomorrow unless you pay them \$350 million and your're not allowed in Casino Arizona anymore. Pay up white man. (Sam1222, April 26, 2007 12:46PM)

Yes, that is another good question...What IS the big deal if the freeway runs through a small portion of South Mountain Park? The trails and wildlife will still be there. Nobody is proposing razing the entire park for more cookie-cutter housing projects. I am less concerned about the South Mountain Park issue than I am about the Pecos alignment. The Pecos alignment is what affects the quality of life for thousands upon thousands of Ahwatukee residents. While I'm not 100% sure of this, I don't think moving the alignment a few hundred yards to the south (on empty land) would have a negative impact on the quality of life for tribal residents. I think the tribes are just generally distrustful of the AZ government/ADOT because of past differences. That is a shame because, again, I still don't see what the problem is regarding THIS particular situation. I could be beneficial for both parties. (Robert6286, April 26, 2007 11:25AM)

@Sam1222

Just for your information, the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indians who control the land which part of the loop 101 is on (and Casino Arizona) has barricaded roads linking parts of Scottsdale which runs through their land because of disputes. The Gila River tribe could do the same thing. People keep saying "What's the big deal if we put the freeway on the reservation, they aren't using the land anyway", well then I say what's the big deal if we run the freeway through part of South Mountain park, we aren't using that part anyway of the park anyway. (Dustin2851, April 25, 2007 10:20PM)

Can anyone rationally explain to me why the Gila River Indian Community will not allow this freeway to run on the extreme northern portion of their reservation? The land is empty and will remain empty unless the Gila River Community decides to develop the land for commercial use, which ironically, will only happen once the freeway has been built. At the end of the day, the Gila River Community WILL benefit from this freeway no matter where it is built and all Ahwatukee residents are asking is that the alignment be pushed a few hundred yards to south. Seriously, what's the problem? (Robert6286, April 25, 2007 10:57AM)

I've lived in my mountain park ranch home for over 20 years. When I moved here I was informed of the proposed South Mountain freeway loop. There was never enough money to build the freeway so it was never built. We had a referendum to increase the sales tax for highways a couple of years back. (I voted against it) For those voting for it, you made the South Mountain freeway a reality.

Let them build the freeway. I would prefer the freeway have only entrances and exits into Ahwatukee and none into the reservation. The reservation wants the benefit of the freeway at no cost to their community.

I see the freeway as the smaller problem, the bigger being the development the reservation wants to do on the south side of the freeway. I believe in the long run this land development will hurt our community more than a freeway. (Mark7294, April 25, 2007 09:51AM)

@phil5543:

Anybody know if there is any truth that the state will wait until housing prices bottom out.

Today's paper:

U.S. housing market worsens as Valley improves: The Phoenix-area median house price of \$265,470 continues to run above the U.S. figure, and March existing homes sales in the area increased over the January and February totals.

Let's see $250 \text{ homes} \times \$265,470 = \$66,367,500$.

Only 1 problem the medium price of homes in Ahwatukee is: $\$338,256$. $250 \text{ homes} \times \$338,256 = \$84,564,000$.

And another problem: you have to do the cost analysis home by home since the lowest priced neighborhood to be bulldozed has homes listed for $\$395,000$ that will be razed. On the other end you have homes over $\$1,000,000.00$ that will be bulldozed. And you have homes approaching $\$2,000,000$ being currently built that must be bought and paved over by taxpayers money.

So since ADOT won't give the public cost projections, the minimum amount to buy houses would exceed $\$84,564,000$ because that price doesn't include the church and businesses to be bought or the moving expenses that ADOT is required to pay all owners.

The cost could approach $\$150,000,000$ easily for 250 homes. Since this freeway if built will be forced to go below grade, that cost will more than double since over 500 homes and businesses will have to be bought. That's in excess of $\$300,000,000$ in today's dollars before ground is broken.

Here's a fact that's puts this madness in perspective:

The State Transportation Board awarded construction contracts last Friday for several major freeway projects, including the addition of carpool lanes to Arizona 51 between Shea Boulevard and Loop 101.

The contracts for the projects, all expected to begin construction this summer, are:

- $\$40.2$ million to add carpool lanes and other improvements to Arizona 51, the Piestewa Freeway, between Shea Boulevard and Loop 101.
- $\$19.6$ million to reconstruct the Interstate 17 interchange at Carefree Highway.
- $\$40.5$ million for improving a 9.5 mile section of U.S. 60 from a two-lane road into a four-lane divided highway between Florence Junction and the Queen Creek Bridge in Pinal County.
- $\$8.3$ million to construct a new Interstate 10 interchange at Bullard Avenue in Goodyear.

The board also awarded a $\$9.1$ million contract to add rubberized asphalt paving to several sections of freeway during the fall.

The cost of buying 250 homes and businesses in Ahwatukee at a conservative $\$150,000,000$ will more than pay for all the above freeway improvements with $\$42,000,000$ left over.

This waste of our transportation dollars must stop. (Sam1222, April 25, 2007 07:08AM)

@Dustin2851:

The tribe is closing down the 101 tomorrow unless you pay them $\$250$ million. Pay up white man. (Sam1222,

April 25, 2007 06:31AM)

Lawyers and Finance Guys:

Just a curious question about Eminent Domain... Does the government have to offer a price greater than what is owed on the property. Could these 250 people actually be upside down??? That would make a huge difference. (wepappguru2282, April 25, 2007 12:22AM)

Quit whining about South Mountain Park. The freeway will use a fraction of 1% of the parkland on the extreme SW corner of the park. Also, this freeway has been planned for almost 20 years, so its called doing your homework when you buy a home and knowing if it will be bulldozed by the construction of a freeway. Also, the city kept approving the building of homes in the path because state law prohibits the purchase of any land for city/state/public purposes until funds have been allocated to actually construct the road/building/etc...and they can't legally stop developers because they may need the land someday. Plus, do you really want the freeway on tribal land when the tribe could just get pissed off or greedy one day and barricade the freeway and demand whatever they wanted? They don't have to answer to the white man.(Dustin2851, April 24, 2007 06:47PM)

BTW, this freeway has been talked about and in the pre-planning stages for more than a decade, long before most of those houses were built. They knew this could happen.

As far as environmental impact, I find it funny that the same people building their homes in the foothills, building that causes displacement of all sorts of wildlife are now worried about disturbing the environment. Hypocrites.(Ken (not_a_wuss), April 24, 2007 06:15PM)

Anyone who doesn't think this will lessen traffic through the Broadway Curve and Deck Park Tunnel is a @#%&. The biggest problem with I-10 is the through truck traffic. Truck traffic that has no other viable way to get from Texas to Los Angeles. And taking I-8 through San Diego takes even longer for trucks. Getting through trucks a way to avoid downtown Phoenix will be a godsend to both truckers and commuters.

I know you Ahwatukee folks are used to traffic jams every where you drive and god forbid your precious community have a freeway run along side of it, but that is the breaks. We have needed this bypass for a long time and the west side of the city (I live in Paradise Valley, so don't start the westside taunts) is not going to stop growing. Time to suck it up and do what is right for Phoenix. Lord knows the rest of us have had to deal with freeways being built in our backyards. I doubt any of you folks were at the SH-51 public hearings.

It is coming, no matter how much you whine and moan. It is just far too necessary to yield to a bunch of crybabies.(Ken (not_a_wuss), April 24, 2007 06:08PM)

Anybody know if there is any truth that the state will wait until housing prices bottom out (which we all know will happen). This way they may be able to pay bottom dollar for these homes.(Phil5543, April 24, 2007 05:02PM)

First of all I'm not an Ahwatukee resident. This freeway will not ease traffic on I-10. Everyone is so frustrated about sitting in grid lock and choking on air pollution that it's clouding your thought process. Do some reserach, get the facts.

Don't you wonder why ADOT is taking so long to release the EIS. Its because they know the federal government will laugh in their faces.

I'm all for progress and paying taxes for transporation projects that make sense. Buy I'll be dammed if I will be OK with them spending my hard tax dollar on a project that isnt going to solve the problem and make things worse.

(Agusto3245, April 24, 2007 04:53PM)

It's about time someone with authority in the process asks for answers before our tax money is flushed down the toilet.

ADOT has blinded the general public and MAG into thinking this is for the good of metro Phoenix when in reality the studies show this freeway will not decrease traffic travel times from 55th Avenue into downtown Phoenix on the west side or decrease travel times from the I-10 I-60 interchange into downtown Phoenix from the east if its built as planned today.

This incredible waste of taxpayer transportation money that won't even solve I-10 rush hour traffic woes has to be stopped and corrected before ADOT wastes \$3 to \$5 Billion of our freeway money that is sorely needed in countless other more important areas.

ADOT has had this plan on the books since the 1980's and the design is still stuck in the 1980's as well. The currently planned 55th Avenue junction is the stupidest thing ADOT has proposed in the last 3 years. No one has the balls to stand up to the City of Tolleson and Car Dealers in Avondale to put it at the correct location - the 101.

And lets condemn part of the countries largest municipal park so we can cut three canyons bigger than the Diamondbacks stadium thru parkland.

And since we're trashing the countries biggest municipal park, let's also build it on top of the city's largest undisturbed Superfund Site and then possibly make the citizen's of Arizona instead of the Federal Government responsible for the mega Billion Dollar cleanup if it leaks into the environment which is a major possibility considering what it being built on it.

And let's pay in excess of \$100 million for those homes, churches, etc of those Ahwatukeans that the City of Phoenix didn't have the balls to stop developers from building on. ADOT loves to say it will only be 200 homes. But if this freeway is built it will go below ground thru Ahwatukee and that more than doubles the homes and businesses ADOT has to buy. To this day Phoenix Mayor Gordon and his officials have still approved building truck stops on future freeway land which they are going to have to buy out and pay for relocation with millions more of your tax dollars.

Shall I go on...because there's plenty more madness and waste in this freeway.

Stop the madness that ADOT has created. Someone with brains needs to step forward.(Sam1222, April 24, 2007 03:50PM)

How is it that Ahwatukee residents got themselves into this mess to begin with?

We all sat back over the last 30 years and wondered how in the world the people that moved there were going to be able to handle the traffic.

EVERYONE in Phoenix knew it was essentially the same as building in a box canyon, but the City of Phoenix and the builders and buyers went dead ahead and kept on developing the land for residential communities, the whole time "hinting" that ADOT would somehow come through with the magic solution and build a freeway "somewhere close" to handle the added traffic.

Well, its a mess (big surprise), and NOW you expect GRIC to bail you out?

The reasons given in the posts I have read are as follows:

- 1-We will somehow find a way of reimbursing GRIC. Gee, bet they've heard THAT one before
- 2-We'll just "take" their land. They don't need it, but we do. It's called the right of Eminent Domain. What's yours is mine, but only when I want it.
- 3-We certainly don't want to live next to a freeway (noise, pollution, traffic) but why can't THEY live next to it?
- 4-250 people in Ahwatukee will lose their homes. No mention of the impact (environmental or economic) to GRIC.

If the majority of the populace of Ahwatukee feels little compunction about reiterating these values, why in the world would you expect GRIC residents to agree to this great deal that you are proposing for them? Maybe you could throw in some swamp land in Florida just to clinch it.

I am not PRO-GRIC or PRO-CITY or PRO-ADOT-just utterly amazed at the lack of reason that has come out of this. Maybe you all should try to find a way of getting through this without embarrassing yourselves. There is absolutely no legal precedent to take GRIC land. A freeway? Don't think so. Look up the legal rulings for cases brought in the State of Arizona. Do yourselves a favor and get everyone together and figure it out, and if GRIC doesn't want to budge, well, who can blame them? I don't believe a solution can be found to make everyone happy, especially at this late stage, but throwing barbs and insults is not an inducement to cooperation (or problem-solving) to any of the parties involved.

(C A427, April 24, 2007 03:40PM)

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